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THE
EXCELLENCY
OF THE
SPIRIT of BENEVOLENCE,
A
SERMON
PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE,
ON
MONDAY, DECEMBER 28. 1772.

By the Rev. JOHN JEBB, M.A.
LATE FELLOW OF ST. PETER'S COLLEGE.

Χριστιανισμος εστι της Θειας Φυσεως μιμησις.

GREGORY NYSSEN.

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TO THE
INGENUOUS YOUTH,
WHO HAVE HONOURED WITH THEIR ATTENDANCE,
THE
THEOLOGICAL LECTURES,
LATELY
INSTITUTED at CAMBRIDGE.*

GENTLEMEN,

IT is the peculiar glory of the Religion we profess, that, at the same time that it tends to inform our understandings, it meliorates our social nature; and, with irresistible energy, inclines us to regard both God and man, with sentiments of fervent love.

For this Reason, in the discharge of my duty as a Lecturer upon the Gospels, I always earnestly exhorted you to consider Religion as a Science, which has for its proper object the culture of the Human Heart.

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* Nov. 21. 1768.

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A constant attention to the End, evidently proposed in the Gospel Dispensation, is one of the most likely means to lead us to a just conception of each particular doctrine. And, as good will to man was the declared purpose of the Almighty in revealing it, and was evidently displayed in every action of our Redeemer, we have reason to conclude, that those doctrines are of prime importance to our salvation, which appear to be more immediately productive of a beneficent practice.

Riches, false pleasures, and the lust of power, are generally esteemed the grand corrupters of our nature; but the pride of heart, which the reputation of superior knowledge, or abilities, too frequently inspires, may be equally prejudicial to the interests of society, and in no less measure destructive of our virtue, and our inward peace.

Happy indeed would it have been for the Christian world, if the professors, of what is termed Religious Knowledge, had been able to plead an exemption
from

from the prevalence of those bad passions, which have so often reflected Disgrace upon our Religion, and Dishonour on our kind.

Our divine Instructor, as if provident of the evils, in after-time derived from this source, dwells with a particular earnestness on the advantages of a meek and lowly spirit; and frequently insinuates to his hearers, that, unless every aspiring sentiment be subdued in their hearts, they would find unfurmountable obstructions even to the entering upon the profession of a Religion, immediately proceeding from that God, who resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble.

But these exhortations would have been to little purpose, had not the genius of his Religion been conformable to the qualifications, which he required in his attentive hearers. A lordly and assuming spirit would, by an unavoidable necessity, have sooner discovered itself in the bosom of the Church, had the Founder of our Religion delivered such

a form of Doctrine, as, in order to its just conception, would have necessarily required an extraordinary exertion of our intellectual powers.

Previously to all inquiry into the Fact, we might reasonably surmise, that a Religion, intended for universal acceptance, at the same time that it unfolded truths, of sufficient importance to engage the attention of the most improved understandings, would also adapt itself to the capacities and circumstances of those, who, with respect to numbers, are by far the most considerable portion of our Species.

This idea, surely not dishonourable to our holy Faith, the labours of many years have now confirmed in my mind.

Persuaded, therefore, of the SIMPLICITY of the Christian Religion, as exhibited in the Scriptures, I have earnestly contended, and, while the Fountain of life and health shall continue to me the power, will persevere in contending, that the grand and fundamental Doctrines of the Gospel are few in number

ber, easy of comprehension, propounded with the utmost perspicuity and plainness, and withal of a nature so intirely PRACTICAL, that not a single ARTICLE OF FAITH, contained in the Word of God, is therein proposed as of necessity to Salvation, which hath not an obvious connection with a just and honourable conduct.

The principle of Benevolence, the excellency of which is the subject of the following Discourse, is particularly recommended as the great CHARACTERISTIC of the Religion of the Gospel.* And we should act wisely, if we always estimated our progress in the knowledge of that Religion, by our improvement in the practice of this manly virtue. — A virtue, so indispensably necessary to the formation of the real Christian, that all other acquirements, of whatever nature they may be, are not of sterling worth, if the heart is found a stranger to its power.

In all your studious researches, therefore

* By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. JESUS.

fore, into the Doctrines of the Gospel, remember to keep this, the most important of them, ever present to your sight. And, when your hearts are animated with the prospect of those future glories, which the Almighty, in his mercy, hath revealed; reflect, that you then will testify your gratitude in a manner, the most pleasing to your heavenly Father, when your lives are distinguished by acts of disinterested affection unto those, who are created in your Father's likeness.

I remain, 4 OC 58

GENTLEMEN,

with great esteem,

your affectionate

and obliged Servant,

THE PREACHER.

A C T S xx. 35.

REMEMBER THE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS,
HOW HE SAID, IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE
THAN TO RECEIVE.

THE Religion of the Gospel, though supported by such Evidence, as might justly command Obedience to its Laws, chiefly aims at our Conversion, by the milder Powers of Persuasion, and a generous appeal to the genuine feelings of the uncorrupted Heart.

Next to the Worship of our Creator in spirit and in truth, it enjoins an obedience to the most pleasing affections of our Nature, as our most essential Duty: and recommends the principle of unlimited benevolence; that principle, from which true happiness must always flow, as the proper motive and incentive to every action it approves.

In conformity with its general language, it delivers the doctrine of my text; *It is more blessed to give, than to receive.*

But may it not be urged, that the sentiment, on which this doctrine is established, is in fact,

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at variance with the common practice, as well as the prevailing disposition of mankind?

Self is the Idol we adore in every stage and period of our existence.

If it be more blessed to give, than to receive; whence is it, that in early life the appetite for sensual pleasure reigns in our breasts without control? Whence is it, that we sacrifice the ease of those around us to every lawless passion? Our powers of being useful in our generation, to the gratification of desires, which at length render us useless to ourselves?

Avarice surely disclaims the doctrine of my text. Nay, even that moderate degree of attention to our welfare, which is dignified with the name of Prudence, consists not in providing for the necessities of others.—Its object is, a decent provision for the supply of those wants, which the laws of nature have imposed upon our race.

Ambition, nay, even Emulation, and the desire of an honest fame, are altogether of a selfish nature. We envy the Pomp, the Power, and even the Virtue, which we are unable to possess. Our own superiority depends as much upon the depression of our rival, as on the elevation of ourselves; the joy of success, in this instance, is therefore utterly unsocial: It too often is founded on the miseries of our kind.

Yet the love of Pleasure, the love of Power,
and

and the love of Praise, are in a manner congenial with the human mind: They appear to be necessary movements in our frame: They call aloud for constant gratification. With respect to these, therefore, it is surely not more blessed to give, than to receive.

Religion itself seems to countenance, and even to applaud, this ardent desire of happiness in our species: She appears to conspire with this general pulse of Nature, with this universal wish of all her offspring.

She calls upon us to leave the paths of Vice, — to pursue the paths of Virtue, by the fear of punishment, — by the animating prospect of Reward.

Let us, however, attend to what the voice of calm philosophy, aided by experience, can urge as a solution of this difficulty.

And first, it must be considered, that the question is not concerning the instinctive desire of happiness; but the mode of conducting ourselves, with respect to the ordinary means of its attainment. And it is contended, that a more rational pleasure, a sublimer satisfaction, will be found in dispensing them to others, than in receiving them ourselves.

The pleasures of Rational Creatures are of a twofold kind.

The gratification of every natural appetite, is pleasing: but the pleasure ceases in the in-

stant of enjoyment. No power of our will can recall it to our remembrance: It remains sunk in deep oblivion; until the appetite returns at its appointed period.

Other gratifications there are, delightful in the moment of enjoyment, and which also upon reflection please.

Oppressed with hunger and with thirst, the soul of man grows faint, — the calls of nature are vehemently loud, — they plead with irresistible eloquence for the accustomed gratification.—But, when the son of misery is satiated with plenty, the torture of his expectation vanishes, — the pleasure of gratification is no more.

But it is not so with the person who relieves him. He felt a supreme satisfaction in contributing to his necessity; — and every recollection enhances the delight.

The Sensations also are widely different in degree.

It is universally allowed, that parental fondness evidences itself much more powerfully than filial love.

Hence we may certainly conclude, that, in this instance, the pleasure of conferring favors is superior to the pleasure of receiving them.

And, although, in strict propriety, no appeal can be made to an almost antiquated passion; yet a similar conclusion may possibly be collected

ed from the animated language, in which the Citizen of Sparta, and of Rome, expressed the fervour of their affection, for their countries cause.

The happiness of the Almighty is certainly as much superior to the happiness of his creatures, as his nature is superior, with respect to intrinsic excellence and power. And his happiness is therefore greater, because they receive from him whatever they enjoy, unable to repay it by a similar return of bounty, while he remains to endless ages the inexhaustible fountain of all good.

The indulgence of the benevolent affections forms our highest happiness also; because the heart, which is animated by them, is a stranger to perplexity and care.

Those tumultuous passions, in whose sad retinue are found disorder, confusion, and despair, are unknown where the gentler Form of Benevolence bears sway. Pride, avarice, anger, and revenge, bow down before her: they are hushed in soft repose; like the beasts of night, when the sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens.

When we consider the numerous wants and imperfections of our nature, we see the Wisdom of Providence, in implanting those seeds of soft compassion in our breasts; which sooth

our mutual sorrows, at the same time that they are the sources of almost every blessing we enjoy.

The words of Scripture, the practice of our heavenly Teacher, confirm this voice of nature, and bind us with additional obligations to its observance.

The Gospel, in every page, exhorts us, to suppress each rising passion, which opposes itself to our neighbour's happiness,—to sacrifice our own emolument to his advantage, — and to subdue the hostile spirit of the injurious person, by accumulated acts of undeserved kindness.

The great Founder of our religion came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for mankind.

His Disciples imitated this great example. And, when we reflect upon the constant tenor of their conduct, — when we behold them calm and composed in the time of danger, — unterrified by every form of persecution and distress, — rejoicing themselves in tribulation, exhorting others to rejoice; we must certainly conclude, that they felt a sincerer pleasure, a more warm and impassioned satisfaction, in their works of benevolence, in their labours of love, than if they had been gratified with the actual enjoyment of whatever wealth, and honour, and dominion could bestow.

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It cannot be urged in opposition to the Doctrine we would establish, that every human action may be traced, until it be found connected with the Love of Pleasure, the Love of Power, or the Love of Praise.

The love of Pleasure animates to action; and experience proves, that the highest Pleasure is found in the performance of those actions which are useful to our species.

The love of Power is virtuous, when we attempt it's acquisition, with a view of increasing our Capacities of doing good.

Approbation and applause are the grateful tribute of Mankind, in return for just and generous conduct. It is therefore a characteristic mark of a benevolent Heart to be influenced by the love of honest Praise. And the delight, arising from the indulgence of this passion, is itself a demonstration, That it is more blessed to give, than to receive.

Every passion, therefore, in our constitution points out, that true enjoyment is only to be found in acts of social Love.

And on this idea, happiness is surely in our power. We cannot indeed command the exercise of our Neighbours kind affections in our favour, but we possess an unlimited power over our own.

Nor can it be urged as an objection to this

Theory, that Religion frequently appeals to the Selfish passions of our Nature; or with reason be asserted, that Revelation, holding forth the gift of Immortality, as the destined reward of our obedience, in fact annihilates the intrinsic excellence, and native dignity of every generous virtue, in the breast of each Believer of the Gospel.

It is readily allowed, that Reward is only due to disinterested acts of virtue.

But the principle of every social, and disinterested affection is gradually formed in the Heart, by a kind of mechanical process, and by the aid of motives, which differ widely from their generated effect.

The hopes and fears, which a belief in the Religion of the Gospel naturally raises in the heart of Man, although, considered in themselves and their immediate consequences, they have no claim to the character of meritorious; yet directly lead to the production of affections, disinterested in their immediate motive, and therefore strictly deserving of Reward.

Under the conduct of right reason, they rouse us from the fatal lethargy of vice, they animate to the practice of every useful virtue; — until at length the Heart, led captive by the charms of truth, forgets the motive, which first engaged it in her service; and expanding

panding itself wide as the Creation of the Almighty, and emulative of the Joy of God, considers every increase of the happiness of others, as an addition of happiness to itself.

Hath Heaven therefore blessed thee with Riches; consider thyself as the appointed dispenser of them to thy Brethren: and know, that thy happiness does not consist in the envied possession, but in the liberal communication, of thy substance.

Thou still wilt be happier than thy poorer Neighbour: — He receives thy favours, thou conferrest them: *It is more blessed to give, than to receive.*

Beat down the Spirit of Pride, which causes thee to insult the lowly fortune of thy less happy Brother. The sense of pain, arising from a comparison of his state with thine, shall be diminished in his breast; and thou shalt find thy reward, in that inward tranquility, which meekness shall inspire.

The gift of superior wisdom, and abilities — the advantages of Learning — are valuable only in the use. He that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow, if he toileth only for himself. If he hath no other end in view, than the gratification of a vain aspiring spirit, the humble diffidence of the unlettered Peasant is more deserving of our praise.

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Let not then the light of science shine inward only on thyself. Let it irradiate thy neighbours footsteps with its friendly beam: Let it light him on his dark and dangerous way through the wilderness of Human Life. The ray of knowledge, which thus informs his mind, shall by strong reflection more powerfully illuminate thine own.

Repine not, though thy humbler station circumscribe thy powers of being useful, within a narrower sphere. No man liveth to himself; the labours of the lowliest of the sons of men are necessary to the well being of the whole. Consecrate them, by an upright intention, to the general good; they shall be remembered to thy praise. True merit shall not hereafter be disregarded, though now it may lie concealed in the obscurer walks of private life. The impartial hour of future retribution shall call forth the friend of man, whatever may have been his station here below, to substantial happiness; and place an unfading Crown of Glory on his Brow.

Nor will that sacred flame, which animates the Patriot, be unknown to the Professor of the Gospel. With conscious dignity of mind, resulting from a sense of high desert, he treads the path of public virtue, with determined resolution; or, like the amiable Founder of our
Re-

Religion, dissolves in tears, at the prospect of the impending desolation of his Country.

Restrain the resentment arising from the injuries of unreasonable men. Thy adversary shall praise thy mild forbearance; and thy forgiveness of a brother's trespass be requited by the more important pardon of thy own offences against the tremendous Majesty of Heaven.

But most of all, be actively benevolent — Glory not in the ferocity of thy nature, nor steel it against the soft sensations of pity and compassion. Better for thyself as well as others, that thy heart should overflow with the milk of human kindness — better that thou shouldest melt at every tale of woe, than possess that unfeeling temper, which forbids thee to rejoice, when thou hearest the voice of gladness; or withholds thy tears, amidst the distresses of a creature of like passions with thyself.

The necessities of our Brethren are so numerous, and the advantages, which the meanest of us enjoy, may be rendered so effectually subservient to the removal of their sorrows, that every one, who possesses the will, may find the power to practise this noblest virtue — this most essential duty of mankind.

The various actions and pursuits of mortal
men,

men, discordant as they may seem to the in-
curious mind, are directed by the hand of
Providence to the general good.

In the imitation therefore of this conduct
of the Almighty will consist the height of hu-
man happiness; as surely, as happiness may be
expected to become our portion, when our
hearts are found consenting with his will.

The relations of life indeed are numerous,
but the common bond is one: that bond is
social love.

On Earth, this joins the hearts of the mar-
ried Pair in softest sympathy of affections —
unites the Master to his Servant — the Parent
to his Child.

In Heaven, it forms that sacred bond,
which shall hereafter join the Angel and Arch-
angel, in blessed communion with the redeem-
ed of the Lord.

Renounce, therefore, O Christian, whatever
be thy rank or station, all attachment to those
unworthy pleasures, to those unworthy cares,
which would allure thee from an animated
discharge of the functions of thy proper call-
ing; and be studious to employ each important
hour, in the exercise of those generous, those
manly virtues, which are at once thy duty and
thy great reward.

The streams of disinterested benevolence,
poured

poured forth on all around thee, shall swell at length the tide of private happiness. And the bread, which thou hast cast on many waters, shall, at the appointed time, with vast increase return to thee again.

Now to the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God, be honour, and glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*



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